



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 54/29 CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN CANADA

An address by the Minister of Trade and Commerce, Mr. C.D. Howe, made at the Conservation Conference of the Canadian Forestry Association, at Ottawa, April 23, 1954.

It is indeed an honour to be invited to speak to you on the final evening of this conference, for few subjects are as significant to the welfare, present and future, of our nation as conservation.

First of all, I wish to congratulate the executives of the five sponsoring organizations for their initiative in calling this conference. You have done a great service to your fellow citizens. I should also like to congratulate all of you from all the organizations represented here for the active interest in conservation indicated by your presence in Ottawa this week.

The last meeting of a similar kind took place here in 1906 under the sponsorship of the Canadian Forestry Association. It was addressed by the Governor-General, the Rt. Hon. Earl Grey, the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier who was President of the Association at that time, and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert L. Borden.

Sir Wilfrid and his associates in the Canadian Forestry Association called the last conference on conservation nearly half a century ago to draw the attention of the Canadian public to the need for a sensible exploitation of our renewable natural resources. In his speech of welcome, he drew attention particularly to the need for adequate fire protection and for reforestation. After suggesting that one way to ensure sufficient trees in the future was to scatter seeds on the newly-cut areas, he continued:

"It is a natural thought that we shall not live to see this young generation of trees at their full growth; but, as has been stated a moment ago by His Excellency the Governor-General, we must not think alone of ourselves, we must think of the prosperity of Canada in the days when all of us shall be sleeping in our graves".

It is fitting that we should tonight pay tribute to those far-sighted Canadians who were thinking of our welfare and of the welfare of those who will come after us. Let us resolve to follow the fine example of citizenship and patriotism set by them.

The concept of conservation today extends far beyond the discussion of forests that occupied the last conference to which I have referred. When we think of conservation nowadays, we include the conservation of the soil, of the fisheries, of the water supply, of electrical power and even of wild life.

And for very good reasons. Canadian forests supply over 80 per cent of the total free world's export of newsprint, and 29 per cent of its lumber. Canada is the second exporter of wheat and live cattle, and an important exporter of other cereal and animal products which depend upon the productivity of the soil.

With a population of less than 1 per cent of the world total, Canada has more than 10 per cent of the world's development hydro-electric power, and three quarters of our water power potential remains to be developed.

Thousands of acres have been reclaimed and restored to productivity in Western Canada by the intelligent use of water resources.

Canada's fisheries, both coastal and inland, have made her the free world's fifth largest producer of fish and the leading exporter of this important food. The fisheries were our very first industry and they remain of great importance to our national economy.

You will understand from these few and well-known facts why the Government of Canada has played an active role in the field of conservation. In doing so, we have applied within our constitutional powers, the principle which I think should be the basis of any conservation policy. That is the principle that our renewable resources should not be depleted at a rate faster than they can be replenished by natural processes aided by human effort. As far as the federal Government is concerned, exceptions to this principle have only been made in times of grave emergency when the very existence of our society was at stake, or when changing times make it most unlikely that future generations will depend as largely as we do on certain resources.

The principle of conservation is such a simple and reasonable one, that people are inclined to take it for granted. But it cannot be taken for granted. It must be pursued constantly and with vigour. A heavy price will be paid by later generations for the lack of a proper consciousness of the need for conservation by their forebearers.

A heavy price is being paid now in many parts of the world because men did not adhere to sound principles of conservation. There are many reasons why proud civilizations of the past have declined and why areas once prosperous are now poverty-stricken. If you search their history well you will find that failure to prevent depletion of renewable resources played a major role in the process of disintegration.

One of the principal problems in Asia today is that of increasing the productivity of areas whose land and forests and other resources have been depleted to excess. I might say that our contributions to the Colombo Plan are to a large extent directed toward helping in a small way to correct that situation.

The purpose of one of the irrigation projects which Canada's assistance is making possible in Pakistan is to restore the productivity of an area which has been completely barren of any harvest for centuries. A number of Canadians are working on that project, which on completion will reclaim a huge triangular area of 93,000 acres for agricultural purposes and will produce 150,000 kilowatts of electrical energy per year as well.

I refer to the large dam at Peshawar. This project is a splendid example of the most modern methods and achievements of Western technology being applied by the Asian peoples with our assistance. This seems to me a very hopeful sign for future relations between the East and the West, and another proof of our desire to do what we can, without exerting any form of influence upon them, to help our friends there to improve their standard of living.

While I am speaking of Pakistan, I should also like to mention another project recently completed under the terms of the Colombo Plan. I refer to the aerial survey carried out in that country with Canadian funds and Canadian personnel to determine the resources of this fellow member of the Commonwealth. This survey will serve as a basis on which our friends can establish a sound policy for the most efficient exploitation of their natural resources.

These projects and others like them are examples not only of our feeling of friendship for the countries of Asia, and our understanding of their problems, but also of our realization of the importance of intelligent use of the world's natural resources in the interests of peace and prosperity in the world.

India also is hard at work in a gigantic effort to make the resources of that country meet the needs of its huge population under the leadership of Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister. Of course, the problems of production in India are very different from those with which we are faced in Canada. In a model farming village near New Delhi, which Mr. St. Laurent visited, practically all the work is done by hand. About the only contribution of Western technology consists of the iron hoes being used by those working in the fields. And yet, even this simple tool has brought excellent results in enabling the inhabitants to meet their needs from the natural resources at their disposal.

The Indians have set themselves a massive task in carrying out a programme which will enable them to restore the productivity of their soil and to use their natural resources to maximum efficiency. I cannot help but think how fortunate we are in Canada to have such an abundance of unexpended natural resources. Surely that good fortune carries with it a great responsibility to see that they are used intelligently, not only for our own benefit, but in the best interest of mankind as a whole.

You are all aware, I am sure, that here in Canada, the British North America Act grants to the various provincial governments jurisdiction over land, forest, mineral and water power resources except on those lands

which are owned by the federal Government, such as our National Parks. The municipal authorities also have a share of the responsibility. However, the magnitude of the problems and the importance to all Canadians of the intelligent use of our natural resources have made it necessary for the federal Government to take an active interest in conservation as well. Without wishing to invade the jurisdiction of the provinces, we have in the past few years taken several steps to assist them in this task.

I begin with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, passed in 1935, and the Marshland Rehabilitation Act, passed in 1948. Through the P.F.R.A. over \$77,000,000 have been spent to carry out land utilization and water conservation programmes in Western Canada. The object of this legislation is to convert submarginal lands to pasture, and to assist owners or occupiers of land in these areas in establishing themselves in less arid sections of the country. Over 1½ million acres of land have been converted into 59 P.F.R.A. community pastures to date and are serving to feed 90,000 head of cattle and 37,000 head of horses. In addition 30,000 dugouts, 6,000 stock-watering dams and over 27,000 irrigation projects have been completed. The largest of the irrigation projects have been completed, these being the projects connected with the St. Mary and Bow Rivers in southern Alberta.

These completed projects have already justified themselves in economic terms. But their full value will not be apparent until, as we know from experience will happen, there is a recurrence of dry years on the Prairies.

Under the Marshland Rehabilitation Act which, in contrast with the P.F.R.A., deals with the problem of an excess rather than a shortage of water, 119 areas, comprising 16,155 acres had been reclaimed by March 1953, and over 53,000 acres have been protected from the sea in the Maritime Provinces.

In order to establish a basis for soil conservation measures, soil surveys have been undertaken in Canada as joint projects of the federal and provincial departments of agriculture and the agricultural colleges. Under the soil survey programme which calls for a systematic study of all present and potential farming areas, 190 million acres have been mapped thus far. More detailed surveys have been conducted where they were required to meet special needs. It is on the basis of these surveys that the P.F.R.A. projects, and a good many others, have been undertaken. Most of the projects are carried out by agreements between the federal Government and the other authorities most directly concerned.

The federal Government has also played an important part in developing and improving farm methods and techniques in order to assist the farmer in obtaining maximum benefit from his land. In addition to the Central Experimental Farm here in Ottawa, there are farms and stations or sub-stations in every province operated by the federal Government for this purpose. The results of research have been particularly useful in preventing erosion. The soil research laboratory at Swift Current, for example, has developed much of the basic knowledge on which current

control practice depends. I might mention in this connection that the two nurseries operated in the Prairies have distributed about 250 million trees to be used in constructing wind breaks.

The federal Government is actively interested in every phase of soil conservation. We are doing our best, independently and in co-operation with the provincial governments, to ensure that our available land is exploited in accordance with sound conservation principles.

The Eastern Rocky Mountain Forest Conservation Act of 1947 is a splendid example of federal-provincial co-operation in this field. The Board set up under this legislation by an agreement between the Government of Alberta and the federal Government has jurisdiction over more than 8,600 square miles along the upper portions of the south Saskatchewan River and its tributaries. Its purpose is to achieve and maintain the most desirable conditions for watershed management in that area, by reducing flood water in the spring and maintaining a greater flow during the summer. In this way the farmers in this area are protected to some extent from the disastrous effects of an excess or a deficiency of water.

The Canadian Forestry Act of 1949 authorizes the federal Government to enter into experiments with any province for the protection, development, or utilization of forestry resources. Under this Act, the federal Government has already concluded agreements with eight of the ten provinces and considerable sums of money have been spent to assist them in completing and maintaining their forest inventories and in the reforestation of provincially-owned lands. This forest inventory is necessary before reforestation can be planned, and before soil conservation, flood control, wild life cover and other projects can be undertaken.

Another smaller and very successful project in forestry conservation, which I might mention, is the agreement entered into with the province of New Brunswick and private industry whereby the federal Government is contributing to the cost of terminating the spruce budworm menace to the pulp-producing trees of that province.

The Canada Water Conservation Assistance Act passed at the last session of Parliament, gives the federal Government authority to grant financial assistance to provincial governments for the construction of major water conservation projects. Representations received for assistance under this legislation are now being studied carefully to see how the Government can best use the funds authorized to be spent in this way.

A very great part of the work for which my colleague, the Minister of Fisheries is responsible has to do with conservation. Extensive research is being carried on continuously in his department to enable Canadians to understand and to exploit to best advantage the harvests of our inland and coastal waters. One example of the government's activity in the inland fisheries field is the exploitation of the Great Slave Lake fish supply. Federal Government scientists studied the fish resources of this huge inland body of water before commercial exploitation began, and set a quota which would ensure the permanency of this important source of supply of trout and white fish.

Another imaginative project is the clearing of the Babine River slide in British Columbia. This tributary of the Skeena River was blocked by a slide of rocks and dirt not long ago, with the result that the salmon were unable to swim up it to their spawning grounds. The federal Government undertook to have the bed cleared again. At a cost of nearly a million dollars, the damage was repaired, and I am told that the number of salmon which went up last year was greater than ever before.

We have signed several international agreements for the conservation of ocean fisheries. Under one such agreement, the federal Government joined with many other governments whose fishermen share the fish harvest of the North Atlantic, in a Fisheries Convention to assure the permanence of the Grand Banks fish supply. On the Pacific another treaty between Canada, the United States and Japan makes provision against the intrusion of foreign fishing vessels in waters over which Canada exercises conservation measures.

I could go on, for in every department of the federal Government concerned with scientific research and national resources, conservation is the watchword. Consider, for example, the conservation aspect of the development of atomic energy. As you may have heard, studies are now being made of the economics of producing electrical power from atomic energy and in due course plants will be erected in Canada for this purpose. It is highly unlikely that atomic plants will replace hydro-electric plants but think of the contribution that will be made by atomic energy to ensuring a better geographical distribution of electric power. Although, as I have already said, it is true that only about one-quarter of our hydro-electric potential is now utilized, it is nevertheless now necessary to supplement hydro-power with steam plants in various parts of the country. In other words we cannot afford to be complacent about our sources of energy. We must conserve them and ever be on the alert to find new economic sources of power.

Conservation has two aspects. First there must be an accurate estimate of the national resources which are to be conserved. Second comes the task of ensuring that the renewable resources are not depleted at a faster rate than they can be replenished.

I need hardly tell you that conservation requires never ending effort. It will be a long time before we in Canada know with a sufficiently high degree of accuracy the extent of our renewable natural resources and what they are capable of producing. My guess is that we shall always be learning something new. As for ensuring that these renewable resources are not depleted at a faster rate than they can be replenished, in this we are only at the beginning.

Think of the progress within a generation in methods of cultivating the soil and of applying fertilizers, particularly in semi-arid areas. Think of the recent progress in control of disease in trees and in cultivated plants. Think of the vast engineering works undertaken in our lifetime to conserve and use water power.

Why this recent progress in the application of the principles of conservation? The answer is obvious. As population grows and standards of living rise, it becomes ever more important to ensure continuous production, and population and standards of living have been rising more rapidly than ever before.

Conservation therefore has become not only a matter of protecting future generations but of ensuring continuing progress in our own time. The federal Government is fully aware of this fact and that is why it has stepped up its rate of activity in conservation matters.

In closing, may I express the hope that your gathering has been productive of plans and ideas that will stimulate efforts leading to the speeding up of conservation projects and more intensive efforts to bring about the results we all desire.

S/A